

TRAVEL AND HOSPITALITY

Marriott, in nod to transformative travel, unleashes furious pace of luxury expansion

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Exterior shot of The St. Regis Cairo in Egypt. Image courtesy of Marriott Luxury

By MICKEY ALAM KHAN

Marriott International will open more 30 luxury properties next year in global locations that anticipate the emerging destinations for affluent travelers as they seek to wring more out of their travel.

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The Bethesda, MD-based hospitality giant will debut these hotels and resorts worldwide to tap into the notion of transformative travel that has given rise to the "Purposeful Luxurian" who is looking to improve mind and body while doing good. The expansion will span the St. Regis, Ritz-Carlton and Edition hotel brands, as well as others in the Marriott Luxury portfolio.

"We want to grow our luxury brands portfolio where luxury is growing," said Tina Edmundson, global brand officer and luxury portfolio leader at Marriott International.

"In addition to established destinations, we know that today's luxury traveler is looking to get off the beaten path and experience new and emerging locations. It's why in 2020 we will be expanding not only in destinations including Tokyo, Istanbul and Rome, but also the places that truly signal the future of luxury travel, including Hobart [Australia], Reykjavik [Iceland] and Rabat [Morocco]," she said.



The Matild Palace, a Luxury Collection Hotel, Budapest, Hungary. Image courtesy of Marriott Luxury

Mind the attitude

The notion of transformative travel has occupied senior management at **Marriott**. The company worked with a team of trend forecasters at The Future Laboratory to understand the attitudinal shifts that is breeding a new genre of travelers.

What Marriott found is that travel motivated and defined by a change in perspective, development and self-reflection has grown popular.

In other words, these travelers are more mindful of the impact of travel on them, those around them and the local communities in which they holiday. These travelers want to create positive memories through positive actions.

"There is a fundamental shift taking place across luxury-consumer values as people are increasingly prioritizing experiences and well-being over goods," Ms. Edmundson said.

"I am seeing a new breed of traveler that is more progressive, proactive and is looking to affect positive change, all while still delighting in the comfort of luxury travel," she said.

"At the same time, the new luxury consumer sees travel today as a means of self-discovery, as a break from the normal routine.

"The modern luxury traveler is more diverse than ever, with a growing variety of tastes, inspirations and references, and today's definition of luxury completely depends on who you ask.

"For us at Marriott International, it means that we need to elevate and evolve our approach and mindset to speak to a guest that is more global, skews younger, and has a different idea of what luxury should look like."



Tina Edmundson is global brand officer and luxury portfolio leader at Marriott International

All over the map

The pick of locations for the new Marriott Luxury properties recognizes the evolution in behavior.

The St. Regis, for example, is opening a hotel in the Egyptian capital of Cairo after the recent debut of its Venice property on the Grand Canal.

The St. Regis Kanai Resort in Riviera Maya, Mexico, and The St. Regis Dubai, The Palm are also slated to open next

year in warm-weather locations.

For its part, the Ritz-Carlton recently celebrated a milestone with the opening of its property in Perth, Western Australia its 100th property under the brand name.

Next year, the Ritz-Carlton Rabat, Dar es Salam opens in the Moroccan capital of Rabat, its first foray into the country. The Ritz-Carlton, Nikko, will grow the chain's footprint in Japan, as will a new hotel in Mexico City in Mexico.

A new hotel will open in Nanjing, China, as that market accepts more affluent domestic and foreign travelers.

In the United States, the Ritz-Carlton, Paradise Valley overlooking Camelback Mountain in Scottsdale, AZ, will grow the brand's resort portfolio.

A major renovation of the Ritz-Carlton, South Beach will be completed next year, even as Marriott works toward the inaugural voyage of the Ritz-Carlton Yacht Collection in June.

Marriott's Luxury Collection too will add to the 114 hotels across 30 countries and regions. The chain opened its first private island destination in North Island, Seychelles, followed by properties in Cyprus, Nanning, Kolkata, and Buckinghamshire.

Next year, Luxury Collection hotels open in Nashville, TN, and the Hungarian capital of Budapest, along with the Tasmanian capital of Hobart.

Edition hotels in New York and West Hollywood proved that Marriott's collaboration with boutique hotel Ian Schrager proved popular with travelers. That modern look will travel next year to Reykjavik, followed by Tokyo and Dubai.



Ritz-Carlton Nikko in Japan. Image courtesy of Marriott Luxury

Sizing up

Marriott has eight luxury brands in its portfolio with 420 hotels and resorts across 65 countries. More than 185 properties are in its signed development pipeline to add 15 countries and territories to its footprint.

All told, Marriott International operates a portfolio of more than 7,200 properties under 30 brands across 134 countries and territories. It is the world's largest hotel company.

That size comes to use when choosing locations or access to talent as well as marketing and sales clout even as Airbnb bites and boutique properties nibble at the edges.

Marriott also competes in the luxury segment with brands such as the Four Seasons, Fairmont, Hyatt, InterContinental and Hilton, among the larger chains.



The Tasman, a Luxury Collection Hotel in Hobart, Tasmania, Australia. Image courtesy of Marriott Luxury

BUT MARRIOTT clearly has the most luxury hotels and resorts in its portfolio, differentiating each brand's USP with

fine distinctions in service, offerings, location and experiences.

"Our scale and breadth of distribution gives us a huge advantage over the competition, placing us at the front lines of a rapidly evolving global luxury economy, and allowing us to identify and respond to trends taking shape across travel," Ms. Edmundson said.

"We have the resources, including a global footprint, operational expertise and customer intelligence to perfectly position us for the future," she said.

"Across all of our luxury brands we are focused on elevating travel with highly contextualized, nuanced brand experiences that signal the future of luxury by allowing our guests to indulge their passions while sparking personal growth."

Experiencing Mykonos with Marriott Bonvoy, the hotel company's loyalty program

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